



Assured Mobility Through Synchronization: Taking on the Counter-IED Fight

By Captain Amber N. Schleuning

As corps engineers during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 05-07, the 130th Engineer Brigade assumed the responsibility of clearing the Multinational Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) main supply routes (MSRs) of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other obstacles. Clearing IEDs proved to be a challenge not only tactically, where the rubber meets the road (*we were reminded every day that the enemy “has a vote”*), but also operationally, at the brigade level of planning and decision making. The fundamentals of assured mobility were identified and understood early in the fight. The challenges were nested in the resources.

Situation and Mission

The mission of clearing the MSRs was given to the 110th Engineer Battalion, which was under the operational control of the 130th Engineer Brigade in support of OIF 05-07. Working in teams, the battalion cleared IEDs, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and other hazards in an area of operations with more than 300 kilometers of roads, dirt, overpasses, and canals. The goals were to clear the routes for coalition forces and deny the anti-Iraqi forces terrain and freedom of maneuver. Daily clearances required the route clearance teams to travel diverse terrain and urban environments, in addition to several different operational environments, making seamless movements difficult.

The 110th developed a working relationship with maneuver elements involved in their current operations. As the route clearance teams or operational environment owners discovered IEDs, the site was cordoned off, the incident was reported among forces, cordons were turned over, and details were

exchanged. With the brigade mission of *assuring mobility*, the focus was on long-term operational planning. The counter-IED fight was more pervasive than the day-to-day success of the route clearance team. To achieve absolute success—allowing the force commander the ability to move and maneuver where and when he desired without interruption or delay—the fundamentals of assuring mobility needed to be properly executed.

The six fundamentals of assured mobility are—

- *Predict* actions and circumstances that could affect the ability of the force to maintain momentum.
- *Detect* early indicators of impediments to the battlefield mobility using intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets; identify alternatives; and establish surveillance.
- *Prevent* potential impediments to maneuverability from affecting the battlefield mobility of the force by acting early; monitor and protect cleared routes.
- *Avoid* detected impediments to the battlefield mobility of the force; if prevention fails, identify alternatives.
- *Neutralize*, reduce, or overcome (breach or, in this case, have explosive ordnance disposal personnel destroy or remove) impediments.
- *Protect* against threat force weapons and tactics, techniques, and procedures through the application of technology or tactical behavior. This is a continuous process.

Assured Mobility Basics From the Corps Engineer Brigade Commander's Perspective

- Get the most out of and integrate enablers to attack the enemy across the spectrum of countering IEDs from *predict* to *protect*—this is a combined arms fight.
- Set and sustain a team objective to achieve success in assured mobility.
- Ensure a steady state of give and take between maneuver and route clearance teams.
- Consistently share analysis with brigade combat teams (BCTs) and task forces. Everyone adds a piece to the puzzle to defeat the enemy's actions.
- Integrate with operational environment owners—frequent face-to-face coordination and liaison officers are essential. Constant communication is essential because the battlefield changes constantly.
- Synchronize with maneuver combat patrols.
- Coordinate and share information with MSR users.
- Execute proper tactics, techniques, and procedures. Ensure security always.
- Protect Soldiers and equipment.
- Increase route clearance team time by embedding explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) assets rather than waiting for EOD personnel.
- Sustain an aggressive route sanitation and crater repair program.
- Predict and make the right changes. Don't get into a rut with route clearance scheduling and targeting—the enemy is always changing.
- Work hard every day to make a difference.



A route clearance team searches for IEDs and UXO.

Brigade Operations in Synchronization

In order to “hit on all cylinders” in the counter-IED fight, the 130th Engineer Brigade created an Assured Mobility Synchronization Cell (AMSC). Field Manual (FM) 3-34, *Engineer Operations*, cites assured mobility as the actions that guarantee commanders the ability to maneuver where and when they desire without interruption or delay to achieve the mission. It requires the understanding of the friendly and enemy actions and the three-dimensional operational environment (subterranean, ground level, and aerial) to permit commanders to act first within the threat opponent’s decision cycle. Thus, the cell’s mission housed the six fundamentals aiming to track and synchronize route clearance teams, logistical convoy movements, maneuver operations, ISR assets, and other engineer enablers.

The AMSC’s first priority included determining the steady state maneuver missions, operational environment owner clearance efforts, and combat patrol capabilities. A detailed targeting process allowed the AMSC to position the route clearance teams so they achieved “time on target” and were integrated in and around ongoing maneuver combat patrols. Adding the layer of tracking logistical convoys, the AMSC needed to ensure that the routes were cleared of IEDs and UXO to safeguard the timely movement of personnel and equipment in-theater. Finally, acknowledging that the threat was *thinking* and would *adapt* to our operations, ISR (the combat multiplier) assets were overlaid and tracked.

Conclusion

The dynamics and resources available in Iraq are constantly changing. Every rotation is unlike the one before. This article is offered as after-action review comments that might possibly be integrated into planning and considerations for the “next round.” In the end, the constant that remains is the need for a combined and synchronized force when tasked with the mission of assuring mobility. Without the synchronization of the force, success in the fundamental engineer task of assuring mobility will always be in question.

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